

Ezekiel, Son of Man
Class 8 - May 21, 2014
Reading: Ezekiel 26-30

Chapter 26

The next three chapters particularly look at the city of Tyre, and prophesy against that city and its king. Tyre was a Phoenician city founded sometime before 1400 BC. It was actually two cities; one, Tyre, was an island on the coast. The second, Ushu, was on the mainland. The defensive walls are recorded to have been 150 feet in height (15 stories). The city island had two harbors that helped to make it an extremely popular port for trade. Tyre itself established a number of colonies throughout the Mediterranean.

Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre beginning in 585BC, and the king abdicated after a 13 year siege. During that siege Nebuchadnezzar attempted to build a siege ramp from land to the city. Later, in the year 332, Alexander the Great laid siege to Tyre. He built an enormous causeway to the city, then destroyed the city and either killed the inhabitants or enslaved them¹. In the time of Jesus it had been repopulated on the mainland, and since then the island is no more, now part of the mainland.

In chapter 26 Ezekiel begins by quoting the heart of the king of Tyre, who has rejoiced with the coming fall of Jerusalem. He sees prophet in the "gate of the nations" begin broken down. Yet God promises it will be Tyre which falls down. Chapter 26 describes a thorough destruction of the city, the city walls, and the population.

From a historical standpoint, this prophecy is a bit unusual (that is, if we stopped before chapter 29). While Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre for 13 years, and Tyre ultimately capitulated to Nebuchadnezzar, there is no record of the destruction of Tyre for another two centuries. What happened? We ought to consider four possible answers to this question.

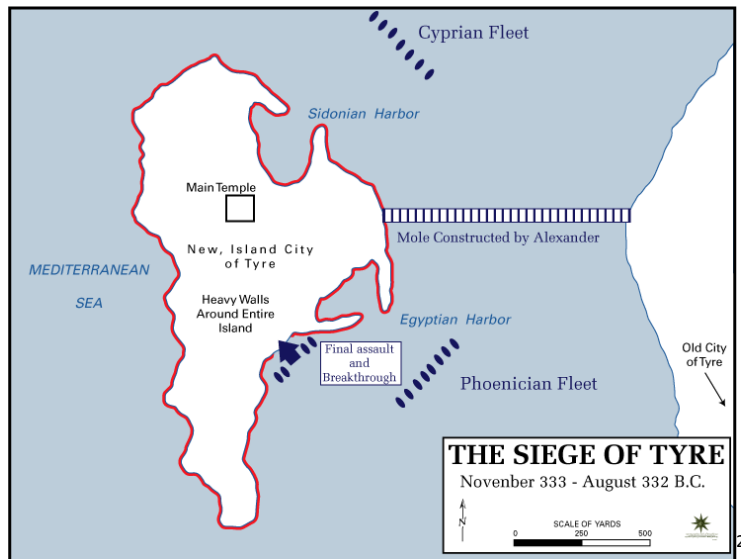
1. Tyre's destruction was economic, not physical: the great destruction described in chapter 26 and 27 was fundamentally in prestige and power. Certainly this is true; once Tyre fell under Babylonian influence, it no longer controlled the colonies it had created. We see in some places where powerful physical language was not physical but manifested itself in some other way. Nebuchadnezzar himself was told by Daniel he would be "cut down", but it occurred in his mental health. So it is possible this language was meant to convey the destruction of that which was most important to Tyre - economics.

2. Tyre's destruction was not recorded accurately in secular history: there are a number of events in the Bible for which there is no archaeological evidence or recorded evidence present. We cannot find Sodom and Gomorrah (which is not surprising); the Exodus of Egypt left little evidence (also, not surprising considering Deuteronomy 8:4 and other miraculous cares); even the murder of the innocent children in Matthew 2 is not found in secular history. If we believed that Biblical records require secular confirmation, where would our faith be? Certainly not in the word. We cannot expect that secular history will submit to Biblical inerrancy; it is possible this is a case of that. One last thought - the Jewish commentary to the prophet Ezekiel from the first and second century note that a tidal wave actually destroyed Tyre in the midst of the siege.

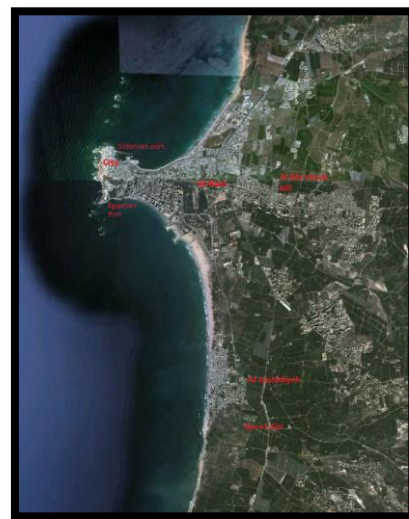
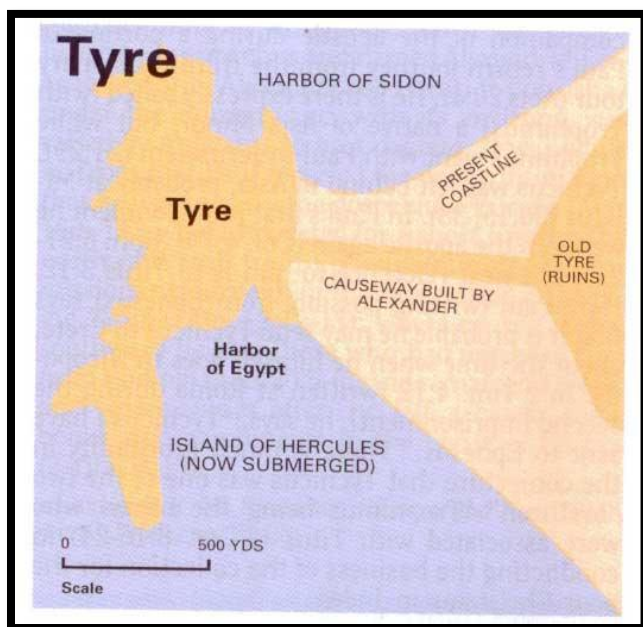
3. God relented on His plan to destroy Tyre: we must consider the strong possibility that Tyre repented, its king repented, and the city was spared from this fate. This is not a novel idea in the Bible; Jonah went to Nineveh to prophesy their demise, but they repented and their fate was postponed. Josiah's tender heart postponed Jerusalem's fate a generation. God told Ezekiel that if men were to repent, their fate would change (Ezekiel 18:21-23).

¹ E.L. Skip Knox (2011). "History of Western Civilization – Alexander the Great".

4. Tyre's destruction was fulfilled by Alexander the Macedonian in 332BC: It is the case that the Macedonian Alexander the Great did utterly destroy Tyre in 332BC. His famous siege was when the enormous causeway (a kilometer long) was built up to the walls of Tyre. Of those not killed in the battle after the siege, 30,000 were sold into slavery, and 2,000 were crucified. God does speak of destruction that occurs decades or centuries later. Some of the prophetic language of Babylon's end did not occur for between two and five centuries (Isaiah 13).



Perhaps Scripture supports the third point as the most likely. God seems to acknowledge this change in plans in chapter 29:17-21. There He tells Nebuchadnezzar that he would receive Egypt as a consolation for the lack of prize in Tyre. Can we find any reason for God to have relented beyond repentance?



² The Department of History, United States Military Academy , Frank Martini. Cartographer, Department of History

Chapter 27

This chapter continues the prophecy against Tyre. The chapter goes to great lengths to describe the nature of Tyre's wealth. It comes from trade from around the world; Greece, Turkey, Spain, Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia are some of the modern nations situated on Tyre's trading partners. If trade is Tyre's great prestige, the listing of their trading partners and their traded goods might constitute "state secrets", and evidence of the knowledge of God of the affairs of men. One cannot help but to wonder if the king of Tyre had great fear upon hearing of this prophecy which listed out publically the entirety of their trade relationships. Who could have known this but an all seeing God?

The second part of the chapter brings the promise of destruction to their seaborne trade. The most important aspect of their lives was the Mediterranean. God promises that the ocean would witness their destruction. Some of the language describes that the sea itself would assault them.

Chapter 28

Now the language points to a specific person: the king himself. He has elevated himself to being a god (vs 2, 9). Not uncommon for regents in ancient times to deify themselves. Tyre's kings may include Ethbaal, the father of Jezebel (in I Kings 16:31 he is identified as king of the Sidonians, but he may have ruled from Tyre as king, as there was a joint kingdom at that time). If his daughter reflects on Ethbaal, perhaps this king in the time of Ezekiel might be characterized in similar fashion.

The king of Tyre believes he as wise, powerful and wealthy as a god. God then describes him in a parallel to Adam in a sense of such splendor of Eden, but that just as Adam lost all, so will the King of Tyre.

An important note here is that this is NOT a reference to Satan. It might be puzzling as to why we make this point here, but many teachers today would tell us that this passage in fact describes Satan's work as a cherub angel in Eden. Yet there is nothing in the text that suggests this is more than the King of Tyre.

There is a change here to the King of Sidon. As we mentioned before, Sidon and Tyre are tightly bound cities, for time one kingdom. Little is recorded about the Babylonian conquest of Sidon. Several centuries later, Persians would besiege the city and kill many of its inhabitants.

Chapter 29

Ezekiel now sets his face against Egypt. For the next few chapters (29-32) Egypt is the focus of God's attention. God had once said never to detest an Egyptian, because of the sojourns in Egypt (Deuteronomy 23:7). At the same time, God commanded Israel not to return to Egypt for protection (Deuteronomy 17), a habit that king Zedekiah and others could not get away from (Isaiah 31:1, Jeremiah 42:15-17).

Egyptian foreign policy has been for some time to use Israel as the buffer state between the Hittites, Assyrians and Babylonians. We even see how the Egyptians sent an army to Jerusalem (only to be defeated, Jeremiah 37). The term used here and in Isaiah 36:6 is that Egypt is a staff of reeds to Israel; Israel uses them for support (when they were supposed to turn to Jehovah), and the staff, because it is made of reeds, splinters in their hands.

God uses language in these chapters that again imposes the idea of a total destruction of Egypt. As mentioned with Tyre, it may be that this destruction is symbolic, is unrecorded, God relented due to Egyptian repentance, or this destruction was to occur at a later date. God spoke of a 40 year desolation of Egypt, and a

³ *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Merrill F. Unger, 2005 printing, p. 1312

return from captivity. Jeremiah, far less symbolic, spoke of Babylon burning the temples of Egypt (Jeremiah 43:10-13, 44:11-14). We might consider that the king of Babylon might not be Nebuchadnezzar, but Darius (Daniel 5:30) under Cambyses or Cyrus the Persian.

Historically and Biblically, Egypt's army was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and the Pharaoh Hophra (Apries) had several revolts subsequent to this defeat. Ultimately he was removed from power by a general (Amasis II), and was killed in battle. It may be said that Egypt was destroyed as a power from this time on. We see that the language of the prophets is that Egypt would physically suffer. The Persian conquest of Egypt a generation later would fit this description.

Chapter 30

As with the pattern for Tyre, now there is a lament for Egypt. As already mentioned, this destruction is because of Egypt's contempt for Israel, using them for their own gain. The idea of the absence of a prince of Egypt would be fulfilled by the Persians in the year 525BC, only 60 years later. The historian Herodotus visited the battlefield a century later and described finding a "sea of skulls" in the Nile basin as a result of the Persian conquest. The Persian ruler Cambyses II made himself Pharaoh, and in a sense no Egyptian ruled Egypt again.

The second part of the chapter is God confirming He has "broken the arm" of Egypt. This may refer to the Egyptian defeat at Carchemesh (Jeremiah 46:2) 20 years earlier. Now Pharaoh Hophra is the other broken arm, by his defeat by Nebuchadnezzar.